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ENGLISH SUMMARY

Prosocial behavior refers to acts that benefit others but have no obvious or direct benefit or personal gains for the actor. There is increasing evidence showing that children's social experiences with same-age peers in elementary school are important for their prosocial development. In the formal elementary school setting, children frequently interact with a wide range of peers in a more diverse context, with less adult supervision than in preschool. The intensive and dynamic interactions with peers make them important and unique socializing agents for children to learn, adjust, and apply their prosocial behavior. Likewise, while learning and applying prosocial behavior with peers, their prosocial behavior also inevitably changes children's relationship with peers.

Despite the likely dynamic interplay between children's prosocial behavior development and their relationship with peers in elementary school, research that addresses the development and influences of children's prosocial behavior in the school peer context, especially using longitudinal approach, is still scarce. Moreover, having mutual and satisfying relationship with peers during elementary school is essential for children's social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment. It is therefore critical to conduct more research, especially using a longitudinal design, to investigate how prosocial behavior influences children's peer experience, and how the interplay between children's prosocial behavior and peer relations influences children's emotional and behavioral adjustment.

The present thesis set out to get a better understanding of the development of children's prosocial behavior and its influence on children's social, emotional and behavioral adjustment in the peer context of elementary school. Two overarching topics were addressed in this thesis. The first topic was to explore how children's prosocial behavior develops in the peer context across elementary school. Specifically, we investigated how a form of prosocial behavior, namely costly sharing with peers (i.e., best friends, disliked peers, and unidentified peers), develops across grades two to six of elementary school (chapter 2). The second topic was about the influence of children's prosocial behavior on their social, emotional and behavioral development. Specifically, we explored how children's prosocial behavior may be linked to or influence their

relationships with peers, as well as their emotional and behavioral adjustment (chapter 2, 3 & 4). In addition to this, we studied prosocial behavior at the aggregated classroom level. We explored how classroom levels of prosocial behavior may influence the association of individual children's peer experience with psychological adjustment (chapter 5).

Data from four different samples were used to answer the aforementioned research questions. All children in the studies attended mainstream elementary schools in the Netherlands, with a predominant number of children having a Caucasian/Dutch background (minimum of 75% or higher per sample). Across samples, different forms of prosocial behavior (e.g., costly sharing, helping, comforting, being nice) were assessed via different informants (e.g., self-report, peer nomination, and teacher report). Together the samples covered the developmental period from kindergarten (age 5) to the final year of elementary school (age 12 years).

Research goal 1: The Development of Prosocial Behavior in Elementary School

Findings in chapter 2 showed that children's sharing behavior generally stayed stable or slightly decreased during the elementary school years. However, the level of sharing behavior differed vastly depending on the recipients of the sharing. Specifically, children were most prosocial towards their best friend and least prosocial towards their disliked peer, while their prosocial level towards an unidentified peer stayed in-between comparing with their best friends and disliked peers. The results also showed that the differences across recipients stayed relatively stable from second to the sixth grade of elementary school.

Research goal 2: The Influence of Prosocial Behavior in Elementary School on children's social, emotional and behavioral adjustment

In chapters 2 to 5, we investigated how children's social, emotional and behavior adjustment may be influenced by their prosocial behavior from two different perspectives: the individual (chapter 2 to 4) and the classroom (chapter 5) perspective.

In chapter 2, the association between the developmental trajectories of prosocial behavior and children's peer relationships was investigated. We found that children who shared less, regardless of the recipients, were more disliked by their peers. In addition,

sharing less and doing so less over time with a disliked peer, were coincided with increasingly being disliked by peers throughout the elementary school years. In contrast, children who shared more with their best friends were generally more liked by their classmates. The finding indicates that being prosocial overall may protect children against being disliked by classmates, while being prosocial to best friends may help children become more liked by peers in general.

In chapter 3 and corresponding supplementary section, the prosociality-related genetic makeup of individual children was investigated. We found that a genetic polymorphism (*OXTR* rs53576), which was associated with children's prosocial behavior, was also associated with children's peer likeability, dislikeability and friendship. These findings suggest that children's genetic makeup may be one of the factors that drives the effect of prosocial behavior on positive peer relationships.

In chapter 4, we explored whether increase in children's prosocial behavior contribute to improved peer relationships, which may subsequently reduce the risk of developing symptoms of depression and aggressive behavior among these children. Results showed that increase in children's prosocial behavior during kindergarten results in improvement regarding their sociometric standing, namely social preference, among peers. This improved preference among peers, in turn, reduced these children's risk of developing depressive symptoms and aggressive behaviors. Overall, these findings suggest that prosocial behavior among children could be a powerful tool to improve their preference among peers, which consequently protects them from developing emotional and behavioral problems.

In chapter 5, we examined the aggregated level of children's prosocial behavior in a classroom to study how classroom levels of prosocial behavior may affect the link between individual children's exposure to relational victimization and depressive symptoms. Surprisingly, our results evidence a healthy context paradox. Specifically, we found that children were less bullied in classrooms with high level of prosocial behaviors; nevertheless, if they got bullied in such a class, the detrimental effect of bullying was amplified by the high levels of classroom prosocial behavior. In other words, children who were bullied in more prosocial classrooms developed more depressive symptom than those bullied in a less prosocial context.